

## 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

*All the readings today deal with the cost of discipleship, the consequences and implications and the personal suffering that are part of dedicating one's life to God.<sup>1</sup>*

### 1 Kings 19:16b, 19-21

The Lord said to Elijah:

**16**“You shall anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah, as prophet to succeed you.”

**19**Elijah set out and came upon Elisha, son of Shaphat, as he was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen;

The number of oxen tells us that Elisha came from a well-to-do family.<sup>3</sup> **he was following the twelfth.** Elisha, the son of a farmer, was in the field plowing when he received the call to become a Prophet and successor of Elijah. He was at home, on his own property, absorbed in an ordinary occupation when he was called.<sup>2</sup> The call to be a disciple comes to ordinary people doing ordinary things (farmers farming, fishermen fishing, shepherds shepherding, tax collectors collecting). We should expect God to reveal the divine will in the ordinary tasks of our lives — not necessarily in smoke and thunder. <sup>1</sup> **Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak over him.** Since the hair shirt mantle of the prophets was part of their official dress, casting it on another would indicate an investiture and initiation.<sup>3</sup> This symbolic gesture signifies a transfer of power.<sup>4</sup>

**20**Elisha left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, “Please, let me kiss my father and mother goodbye, and I will follow you.” This was a normal request.<sup>3</sup> Elisha recognizes the meaning of the gesture and agrees to follow Elijah, but he begs permission to say farewell to his parents first.<sup>4</sup> **Elijah answered, “Go back! Have I done anything to you?”** This answer means, “Go ahead. Have I done anything to stop you?”<sup>3</sup>

**21**Elisha left him, and taking the yoke of oxen, slaughtered them; he used the plowing equipment for fuel to boil their flesh, and gave it to his people to eat. Elisha paid the price of discipleship as he gave up his worldly possessions to follow God's call. The sacrificial meal on the spot, shared by his neighbors and accompanied by the destruction of his farming equipment, signifies Elisha's renunciation of his previous life for his new vocation as Elijah's disciple.<sup>3</sup> **Then Elisha left** This story is an example of a complete and unreserved response to God's call. Elisha renounces his former life completely, destroying the tools of his trade and leaving himself no fall-back position if his new calling doesn't work out. God has called him through Elijah, and Elisha entrusts his whole future to God.<sup>4</sup> **and followed Elijah as his attendant.** Moses had Joshua as attendant. The position, although menial, may have enjoyed certain prerogatives, for both Joshua and Elisha succeeded in a sense to the place of their masters.<sup>3</sup> Elisha eventually receiving a double portion of the prophetic spirit of Elijah.(2 Kings 2: 9-11)

### Galatians 5:1, 13-18

**Brothers and sisters:** The Law of Moses, which was divinely revealed, was something good; it suited the circumstances of the time. Christ came to bring this Law to perfection. All the elaborate legal and ritual prescriptions in the Mosaic Law were laid down by God for a specific stage in Salvation History, that is, the stage which ended with the coming of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

**1****For freedom Christ set us free;** He is not referring here to a freedom from laws or rules as much as he is referring to a freedom FOR loving and doing God's will.<sup>4</sup> **so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.** Even in the Exodus, the Jews were freed from slavery in Egypt only to be able to serve God more faithfully.<sup>5</sup> The Council of Florence declared that Christians cannot observe the Mosaic ceremonies of the Old Covenant as necessary for salvation without sinning

gravely. Although it was permitted for Jewish converts to maintain their ancestral traditions in the earliest days of the Church, this grace period ended with the wide dissemination of the gospel. Thereafter neither Jews nor Gentiles could lawfully uphold circumcision, animal sacrifices, or dietary distinctions as legitimate practices in the New Covenant.<sup>8</sup>

In the missing verses, Paul deals with the temptation among the Galatians under the influence of other preachers to have themselves circumcised and take on the obligations of the Jewish law. Paul insists that Christ has freed us from the burden of that law and that we should not take on the yoke of slavery again.<sup>4</sup>

**13**For you were called for freedom, brothers and sisters. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; Christian liberty is not a license to indulge in sin and selfishness. rather, serve one another through love. We are free to mature in grace and become the saints we are called to be. Once Christ has freed us from sin, the ceremonies of the Old Law, the curses of the Law, and the tyranny of our fallen nature, it is grossly irresponsible to despise his grace by reverting to the old ways. This would lead again to spiritual slavery, putting offenders in a worse position than ever before.<sup>8</sup> If he does away with the Law, Paul wants to stress that the Christian cannot abandon himself to an earthly, material, Godless conduct. His freedom must be one of service, motivated by love, a freedom for others.<sup>3</sup> rather, serve one another through love.

**14**For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” St. Augustine comments on why Paul speaks only of love of neighbor when in fact charity is perfect only if one practices both precepts of love of God and love of neighbor. But who can love his neighbor, that is, all men, as himself, if he does not love God, since it is only by God’s precept and gift that one can love one’s neighbor. So since neither precept can be kept unless the other be kept, it is enough to mention one of them. When the Savior came, the Decalogue continued in force, because it was part of the natural law. Indeed, Christ reinforced it and showed that the key to and essence of the Ten Commandments is Love—love of God, which necessarily brings with it love of neighbor.<sup>7</sup>

**15**But if you go on biting and devouring one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another. The Law, according to the usual interpretation given to it in Christ’s time, stressed the principle of reciprocity. When the law of retaliation was begun, it marked progress with respect to the surrounding civilizations. But it did not give the true measure and standard of justice and of love. To give to one who gives and to refuse to one who refuses, good for good and evil for evil—all this falls short of the teaching and the example of the Lord. In the exchange of good for good, there is easily a lowering of generosity, and in the exchange of evil for evil there is always a heightening of hatred.<sup>2</sup>

**16**I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh. Here Paul describes an enduring line of conduct, a way of life, not just an individual, isolated act.<sup>5</sup> Paul alerts readers that a hidden war is waged in the heart of every Christian. It is a struggle between the Spirit and our flesh. Because of our weaknesses, victory in this struggle is possible but NOT easy.<sup>8</sup>

**17**For the flesh By this Paul refers to our unredeemed or fallen nature that is affected by Original Sin.<sup>4</sup> has desires against the Spirit, This refers to our redeemed humanity that is transformed by grace.<sup>4</sup> and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want.

**18**But if you are guided by the Spirit, This describes an enduring line of conduct, a way of life, not just an individual, isolated act.<sup>5</sup> you are not under the law. True Christians do far more than what the law requires. Paul then goes on to list actions to be avoided which stem from a disordered love of oneself: fornication, impurity, licentiousness (disregard for rules of moral conduct, especially disregarding sexual restraints), idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, bickering, jealousy, outbursts of rage,

selfishness, dissensions, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like, which are all failures against justice and love. (5:19-21) This cannot and should not be the life-style of those who have accepted the rule of God in their lives.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, he lists the fruits of the Spirit which should characterize a believer's relationships with other believers: charity, joy, peace, patient endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, mildness and chastity. (5:22-23)

## Luke 9:51-62

**51** When the days for Jesus' being taken up were fulfilled, he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem, and he sent messengers ahead of him. This is a reference to the sequence of events that climax in his Ascension.<sup>10</sup> Jesus enters the last period of his life.<sup>2</sup> There his destiny as the Savior of the world will be fulfilled.<sup>2</sup> From this point on, in Luke's gospel, Jesus proceeds toward his death and glorification in the holy city.<sup>4</sup> These emissaries are a sort of advance party of scouts who will prepare a place of hospitality.<sup>11</sup>

**52** On the way they entered a Samaritan village to prepare for his reception there,

**53** but they would not welcome him because the destination of his journey was Jerusalem. The Samaritans were hostile towards the Jews. This enmity derived from the fact that the Samaritans were descendants of marriages of Jews with Gentiles who repopulated the region of Samaria at the time of the Assyrian captivity (in the eighth century before Christ). There were also religious differences: the Samaritans had mixed the religion of Moses with various superstitious practices and did not accept the Temple of Jerusalem as the only place where sacrifices could properly be offered. They built their own temple on Mount Gerizim, in opposition to Jerusalem; this was why, when they realized Jesus was headed for the Holy City, they refused him hospitality.<sup>9</sup>

**54** When the disciples James and John saw this they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?" Here his disciples are invoking the law of retaliation. They are full of zeal but lacking in mercy. They wish Jesus to follow the example set by Elijah, who called down fire from heaven to consume messengers from the king of Samaria.<sup>10</sup> Jesus corrects his disciples' desire for revenge, because it is out of keeping with the mission of the Messiah, who has come to save men, not destroy them.<sup>9</sup>

**55** Jesus turned and rebuked them, Jesus does not force people to welcome him nor does he seek revenge when he is rejected.<sup>2</sup> St. Ambrose commented: "The Lord does everything in an admirable way....He acts in this way to teach us that perfect virtue retains no desire for vengeance, and that where there is true charity there is no room for anger. Indignation should be very far from holy souls, and desire for vengeance very far from great souls."<sup>9</sup>

**56** and they journeyed to another village. Possibly also a Samaritan village. According to Acts 8:5-25, Samaria was well-disposed toward Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

**57** As they were proceeding on their journey someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Here and in verse 61 are the only places in the Gospel where someone volunteers to follow Jesus.<sup>11</sup>

**58** Jesus answered him, "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head." Jesus does not trick anyone into following him; he wants total dedication.<sup>3</sup>

**59** And to another he said, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, let me go first and bury my father." To bury one's father was a sacred responsibility and practical extension of the Commandment to honor one's parents. However, the duty of Christian discipleship is more sacred still.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>60</sup>But he answered him, “Let the dead bury their dead. This is a play on words: “Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead, mine is a message of life.”<sup>3</sup> But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

<sup>61</sup>And another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home.” Postponing commitment to the kingdom is equivalent to rejecting it. Elijah allowed Elisha to say good-bye to his parents but Jesus’ demand is stricter.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>62</sup>To him Jesus said, “No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.” St. Francis de Sales offers us an insight. “We receive the grace of God in vain, when we receive it at the gate of our heart, and do not let it enter our heart. We receive it without fruit, since there is no advantage in feeling the inspiration if we do not accept it. It sometimes happens that being inspired to do much we consent not to the whole inspiration but only to some part of it as did those good people in the Gospel, who upon the inspiration which our Lord gave them to follow him wished to make reservations, the one to go first and bury his father, the other to go to take leave of his people.”<sup>9</sup>

*Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2004” by Aelred R. Rosser, (2) “Saint Joseph Commentary on the Sunday Readings: Year C” by Achille DeGeest, O.F.M., (3) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (4) “workbook for lectors and gospel readers: Year C” by Lawrence E. Mick, (5) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Galatians” by John J. Pilch, (6) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (7) “The Navarre Bible: Romans And Galatians,” (8) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letters of St. Paul to the Galatians & Ephesians” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (9) “The Navarre Bible: ST LUKE,” (10) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke,” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, and (11) “The Gospel of LUKE” by Luke Timothy Johnson.*

*In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.*